



Tuesday, May 04, 2004

Mini-storage meets big protest

Rally draws hundreds of supporters

By Ryan Rose

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No matter how “mini” it may be, a storage facility on Green Valley Road does not sit well with local residents.

To show their contempt for the project, hundreds of residents attended a protest rally last Sunday at the proposed construction site across from Brown’s Ravine. Dozens of residents held signs demanding the development stop, while children dressed as oak trees and squirrels called for the ecosystem to remain undisturbed.

“Save our trees,” sang the children. “Don’t take away our habitat.”

Hosted by Foothill Residents for Appropriate Land Use, a non-profit organization created by upset residents, the rally drew a large crowd. Passing motorists pulled off the road to sign petitions demanding the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors rezone the area back to residential or parkland in the new general plan, thus preventing the developer, Peninsula Group Inc., from building the storage facility.

“At all times, we have had 30 to 40 people here. I would say hundreds have come by,” said Mark Obrochta, who joined his wife, Laura, in spearheading the anti-storage movement.

Ryan Rose/THE Telegraph Laura Obrochta distributed information about the proposed mini-storage during a protest rally at the site. Local children dressed s oak trees and squirrels attracted the attention of passing motorists.

Traffic became so congested during the rally, the California Highway Patrol dispatched units to keep traffic moving.

“We were driving by and noticed the sign and pulled over because we don’t want this mini-storage going in,” said Laura Morse, who approached Obrochta with the words, “Where do I sign?”

Since the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors approved development of the mini-storage at their March 30 meeting, the project has been a hot-button topic for many in the area. Drawing coverage from news agencies from throughout the region, FRALU’s point is being heard, and judging from the rally, is also very popular.

As proposed, the mini-storage will occupy 6 acres of a 17-acre property approximately 800 feet west of the intersection of Green Valley Road and Francisco Drive. Hundreds of oak trees grow on the land, which is visible from Telegraph Hill, the Hidden Acres quarter and the future site of the Francisco Oaks development.

Originally denied in August 2003, the supervisors allowed a rehearing on the issue after the property developer, Peninsula Group Inc. threatened a lawsuit, claiming the county was limiting their development rights. The board had previously denied two proposals from the development group.

Lawyers from both sides approved a settlement agreement last month in an effort to curtail further litigation. The arrangement stipulated the county would rehear the proposition, while under no obligation to approve the plans.

County Counsel Lou Green said the agreement also included benefits if supervisors voted to approve. According to Green, developers agreed to cede an easement on the property to the county's Department of Transportation for use as a pedestrian/bike trail. The agreement also includes a condition the remaining 11 acres would become an "oak tree sanctuary."

Having dodged a lawsuit with Peninsula Group Inc., the Board of Supervisors may have to deal with local residents with a lawyer of their own.

"We have retained Bill Yeates and we are hopeful that we can overturn this decision," said Obrochta.

As of press time, the board of supervisors had not decided whether or not to augment the general plan to allow FRALU's request.

For more information on FRALU events, visit their website at www.nostorage.org or email the group at nostorage@sbcglobal.net. The group is also accepting tax-deductible donations, which can be sent to 2222 Francisco Blvd. #510-230 in El Dorado Hills.